

CHICAGO CULTURAL ALLIANCE

MEETING THE MOMENT



Crisis Communications 101: Planning Before You Need It

*Presented by : Laura Herrera, Chief Marketing Officer,
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INTRODUCTIONS

Laura Herrera

Chief Marketing & Revenue Officer,
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Laura Herrera is a cultural leader, strategist, and entrepreneur with two decades of experience advancing mission-driven organizations. As Chief Marketing and Revenue Officer at the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, she leads integrated strategies to grow audiences, revenue, and brand impact while positioning the museum for its 2033 centennial vision.



AGENDA

01 What constitutes a crisis?

02 Why Organizations Struggle During Crises

03 Building a Crisis Communications Plan

04 Responding Thoughtfully

05 Knowing When to Escalate



WHY CRISIS PLANNING IS NECESSARY



Every organization will face a difficult moment.

- A crisis doesn't have to define your organization.
- But your response can.

WHAT IS A CRISIS?

- **A crisis is any situation that:**
 - Threatens safety
 - Threatens trust
 - Threatens reputation
 - Threatens operations



NOT EVERY PROBLEM IS A CRISIS

- Examples:
 - Negative comments
 - Minor complaints
 - Internal disagreements
 - Program feedback

If everything is a crisis, nothing is.



COMMON CULTURAL NONPROFIT CRISIS SCENARIOS

- Staff misconduct
- Board conflict
- Financial instability
- Program failures
- Safety incidents
- Public controversy
- Political pressure
- Social media backlash



THE ANATOMY OF A CRISIS

1. Something happens
2. Information is incomplete
3. Internal anxiety rises
4. Questions begin
5. Pressure increases
6. Mistakes get made



THE FOUR MOST COMMON MISTAKES

- **Moving too quickly**
- **Moving too slowly**
- **Saying too much**
- **Saying too little**



WHY ORGANIZATIONS STRUGGLE

The Real Problem

Most crisis failures are not communications failures.

They are:

- Leadership failures
- Decision-making failures
- Process failures



THE PRESSURE TO RESPOND IS REAL

Urgency ≠ Emergency

- Slow down
- Confirm facts
- Assess impact
- Align internally



LIFE SAFETY IS DIFFERENT

When people may be harmed:

- Communicate quickly
- Communicate clearly
- Communicate repeatedly

Speed matters and being prepared is necessary



MOST OTHER SITUATIONS REQUIRE DISCIPLINE

**The goal is not to respond first.
The goal is to respond responsibly.**



TRUST IS NOT CREATED DURING A CRISIS

Trust is revealed during a crisis.

- What Builds Trust Before A Crisis?
 - Consistency
 - Transparency
 - Responsiveness
 - Credibility



BUILDING A PLAN

- What A Crisis Plan Actually Does
 - Creates:
 - Clarity
 - Alignment
 - Speed
 - Accountability



THE ANATOMY OF A GOOD CRISIS PLAN

- Every organization should know:
 - Who decides
 - Who approves
 - Who speaks
 - Who needs to know



YOUR CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

- Minimum team:
- Executive Director
- Communications Lead
- HR Lead (*if appropriate*)
- Legal Counsel (*if appropriate*)
- Board Leadership (*when appropriate*)



CONTACT LISTS MATTER

- Do you have:
 - Personal phone numbers?
 - Board contact information?
 - Legal contacts?
 - Key stakeholders?

Before you need them?



RESPONDING THOUGHTFULLY

The First Hour Is For Thinking, not performing.

The First Hour Checklist

1. Gather facts
2. Confirm facts
3. Identify stakeholders
4. Establish leadership
5. Determine timeline



YOUR STAFF ARE YOUR FIRST AUDIENCE

- Before:
 - Media
 - Social media
 - Donors
 - Partners



WHAT STAFF NEED DURING A CRISIS

- Facts
- Context
- Expectations
- Updates



STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

- Who needs information?
 - Staff
 - Board
 - Donors
 - Community
 - Media
 - Partners
 - Government



DOES THIS REQUIRE A PUBLIC STATEMENT?

- Questions:
 - Was someone harmed?
 - Is trust affected?
 - Is misinformation spreading?
 - Is the media asking questions?
 - Will stakeholders expect a response?



HOLDING STATEMENTS

- Purpose:
 - Acknowledge
 - Confirm awareness
 - Demonstrate action
 - Buy time



HOLDING STATEMENT FORMULA

- We are aware of the situation.
- We are gathering information and assessing the facts.
- The safety and wellbeing of our community remains our priority.
- We will provide updates as more information becomes available.



INTERNAL TALKING POINTS

- Managers should know:
 - What happened
 - What we know
 - What we don't know
 - What staff should do
 - Where questions go



WHEN TO ESCALATE

- Seek legal review when:
 - Employee issues
 - Litigation risk
 - Safety incidents
 - Regulatory concerns
 - Criminal investigations



WHAT TO STOP DOING

- Respond emotionally
- Guess
- Speculate
- Over-explain
- Wait for perfect information
- Create approval bottlenecks



CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS IS LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS

- People are evaluating:
 - Clarity
 - Accountability
 - Transparency
 - Confidence
- Not just your words.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Not every issue is a crisis.
- Not every crisis requires an immediate public statement.
- Life safety requires speed.
- Most other situations require discipline.
- Preparation matters.



RESOURCES

- Participants will receive:
 - Crisis Communications Plan Template
 - Holding Statement Builder
 - Escalation Checklist



Q&A



THANK YOU !

